

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-02 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8699
INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 02601

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, SREF, LA, TH, EAID
SUBJECT: THAI-LAO RELATIONS: WONG TRIP TO VIENTIANE

SUMMARY: THAILAND'S DEPUTY FONMIN VISITS LAOS JAN 25-26 TO
PRESENT TOKEN THAI AID OF RICE AND SALT TO THE LAOTIANS.
DURING VISIT, THE THAIS MAY ALSO RAISE SUCH ISSUES AS REFUGEE
REPATRIATION, LAO SUPPORT TO THAI INSURGENTS AND CIVIL
AVIATION. RECIPROCATING THAI EFFORTS, THE LAOTIANS HAVE,
AFTER A TWO YEAR HIATUS, NAMED AN AMBASSADOR TO THAILAND AND
ARE UNDERTAKING LOCAL DISEUSSIONS WITH THAIS ON MEKONG RIVER
PROBLEMS. END SUMMARY.

1. DEPUTY FONMIN WONG POLNIKORN BEGAN A TWO-DAY VISIT TO
VIENTIANE JAN 25 TO DELIVER 1500 SACKS OF RICE AND 1000 SACKS
OF SALT TO THE LAOTIANS AND, DEPENDING ON THE ATMOSPHERE, TO
TRY TO UNDERTAKE A DIALOGUE WITH VIENTIANE ON PERSISTENT
PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE TWO NATIONS. REVEALING THE SCOPE
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OF THE DELEGATION'S INTERESTS, WONG INCLUDED IN HIS TEN
PERSON DELEGATION UNDERSECRETARY OF INTERIOR WINYU
ANGKANARAK, WONG'S POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DEPUTIES, AND
THE GOVERNOR OF NONG KHAI PROVINCE, ACROSS THE MEKONG
FROM VIENTIANE.

2. MFA INFORMED US THAT NO FIRM AGENDA HAS BEEN AGREED

UPON. DEPUTY FONMIN WONG WILL ASSESS THE ATMOSPHERE BEFORE DECIDING WHAT TO PURSUE. HE IS EXPECTED TO BROACH THE REFUGEE REPATRIATION ISSUE IN THE CONTEXT OF GENERAL IMPROVEMENT IN THAI-LAO RELATIONS. MFA IS PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN THE VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION OF LAO PEASANTS WHO HAVE FLED TO THAILAND, BUT WHO NOW MAY WISH TO RETURN TO LAOS. ALTHOUGH REFUGEES HAVE DEMANDED, AS CONDITIONS FOR REPATRIATION, CONTINUE UNHCR SUBSISTENCE SUPPORT AFTER RETURN TO LAOS AND AN RTG GUARANTEE CONCERNING THEIR LONG-TERM SECURITY, THE RTG IS NOT PREPARED TO PRESS SUCH DEMANDS AND WILL ONLY TRY TO IMPROVE OVERALL RELATIONS WITH LAOS, HOPING THEREBY TO BRING ABOUT THE EVENTUAL RETURN OF THE REFUGEES TO LAOS.

3. MFA OFFICIAL SAID DEPUTY FONMIN WONG MAY ALSO RAISE ISSUE OF LAO SUPPORT FOR THAI INSURGENTS OPERATING FROM LAOS WITH SUPPORT FROM VIENTIANE. ISSUE HAS BEEN RAISED BEFORE, BUT ANSWER HAS ALWAYS BEEN IDEOLOGICAL RATHER THAN DEVELOPMENT OF A DIALOGUE ON THE SUBJECT.

4. THAIS WILL BEGIN PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS ON AMBER ONE OVERFLIGHT ROUTE BETWEEN BANGKOK AND HONG KONG AND ALSO SEEK TO DISCUSS THE POSSIBILITY OF A BANGKOK-VIENTIANE-HANOI ROUTE FOR THAI PLANES. MFA EXPRESSED OPTIMISM ON BOTH ISSUES.

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5. IN THE BACKGROUND OF WONG'S VISIT, MFA OFFICIAL COMMENTED, ARE SEVERAL FAVORABLE INDICATORS. MFA S VKES-

MAN ANNOUNCED JAN 24 THAT THE RTG HAS AGREED TO VIENTIANE'S PROPOSAL TO APPOINT WANGTHONG SAENG MUANG AS AMBASSADOR TO THAILAND. (WANGTHONG, 45, WAS A COMMERCIAL ATTACHE IN HANOI IN 1974 AND IN BANGKOK IN 1976-77.) DEPUTY FONMIN WONG, BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE FOR VIENTIANE, ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT VIENTIANE HAD AGREED TO RELEASE 15 MORE THAI NATIONALS, ARRESTED BY THE CURRENT LAOTIAN REGIME. AS ANOTHER FAVORABLE INDICATOR, LOCAL (DISTRICT) THAI AND LAO OFFICIALS MET JAN 11-13 IN THAILAND'S MUKDAHAN DISTRICT, OPPOSITE LAOS' SAVANNAKHET PROVINCE, TO DISCUSS SAFETY MEASURES FOR NAVIGATION ON THE MEKONG.

6. IN A CONCLUDING COMMENTARY ON LAO-THAI RELATIONS, MFA OFFICIAL RECALLED THAT BANGKOK HAD MADE STRENUOUS AND GENEROUS EFFORTS IN 1975 TO ASSIST THE COALITION GOVERNMENT IN LAOS PRIOR TO THE PATHET LAO TAKEOVER. THEIR EFFORTS TO WOO LAOS INTO CLOSER TIES WITH THAILAND CAME TO NAUGHT WHEN THE PATHET LAO TOOK CONTROL, BUT A PERMANENT FEATURE OF THAI POLICY IS TO TUG LAOS INTO

THAILAND'S ORBIT AND AWAY FROM VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE.
CURRENT GOOD WILL GESTURES ARE PART OF THIS PROCESS.
IN THE VIEW OF MFA OFFICIAL, LAOTIANS SOME DAY WILL TIRE
OF VIETNAMESE DOMINATION AND RETURN TO TRADITIONAL,
FRATERNAL RELATIONS WITH THEIR THAI COUSINS.

7. COMMENT: WE ARE NOT SANGUINE THAT A CHANGE IN ORIENTATION BY
VIENTIANE FROM HANOI TO BANGKOK WILL OCCUR SOON, BUT THE
NEW KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT HAS MADE SERIOUS EFFORTS TO
IMPROVE TIES WITH VIENTIANE, WHICH NOW SEEM TO BE PAYING
OFF TO SOME EXTENT.

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